Flyin’ West Worksheet

1. Describe the *stasis* in the play: where, when, who, what, etc. in a paragraph.

This play revolves around sisters Sophie, Fannie, and Minnie who live in Nicodemus Kansas, which is an all black town. It is set in 1898 in a time when African Americans were settling the West to escape racial prejudice in the South. The play also includes Frank - Minnie’s abusive husband, Miss Leah - who acts as the matriarch of this pieced together family, and Wil - the women’s neighbor.

2. What is the *intrusion*?

The intrusion occurs at the end of Act I when Frank returns from town and tells the women that he has lost all his money in a gambling match. He is drunk and assaults his wife, Minnie.

3. What is the *unique factor*?

Minnie and Frank are coming back to Nicodemus from London.

4. What is the *dramatic question* that should be answered by the end of the play?

Will the women shoot (or somehow kill) Frank and continue to farm their land in peace?

5. Provide an illustration of the *two kinds of exposition* that the play has in it.

Known to one: Only Minnie was aware that she was pregnant, and chose to reveal this information at a very crucial moment.

Known to all: The fact that Frank is abusing his wife is evident from the beginning of the play when Fannie and Miss Leah see Minnie’s bruising. This concern prompts much of the discussion and action in the play.

6. Identify the most *theatrical moment* in the play and of what importance it seems to be.

To me, the most theatrical moment of Flyin’ West occurs when Frank storms into the house after having lost the gambling match, beats Minnie, and narrowly escapes being shot by Sophie. This scene creates a lot of tension to be resolved in the second act and shows how far the women are prepared to go to get rid of Frank and keep their land safe.

7. List some of the *themes* of the play.

Domestic violence

African American community and tradition

Discomfort with mixed race individuals

The strength and wisdom of women

The desire for a home

Satisfaction in working land/pride in one’s property

8. What do the principal characters *want* and what are some *obstacles* that stand in the way of them getting what they want?

The women as a whole want to build a school and a library in Nicodemus, yet there could be opposition from any white men who come to the town.

Sophie wants to kill Frank immediately but stops when she learns Minnie is pregnant (not that a child is really an obstacle… )

Minnie wants to continue farming her land, but Frank takes the deed to the house to pay for his debt.

Frank wants to have part of his father’s inheritance, but his white half-brothers disinherit him.

9. Describe some possible *images* in the play and how does the *title* help us understand the play.

Minnie’s braided hair could represent black heritage that Frank wants so desperately to separate himself from.

This play happening at the beginning of winter reenforces the idea of impending hardship for the women. Their “freedom” from Frank also goes along nicely with spring.

The title Flyin' West reminds readers that African Americans had to “flee” the South where their oppression was unbearable. They ran West to create their own, free town. It also makes audiences think about how all the characters came together from separate places to be in this one town. There is a hope about “flying” to a better place, like the characters just can’t wait improve their town and start a better life.

10. Briefly define the *family relationships* that are examined in the play.

The play looks at what it means to be a sister - not all the women are necessarily related, but they all care for each other like sisters would. Miss Leah also acts like the mother to this group of characters. She gives Minnie motherly advice on having children and cares for her when Frank beats her. The play also examines romantic relationships, both with Minnie and Frank who have an unpleasant relationship, and Fannie and Wil whose relationship is just beginning to form. The play even looks into the interactions between Frank and his white half-brothers who disinherit him.